

ENJOYMENT EMPOWERS EFFORT (Colossians 2:20 – 3:17)

My first question is *'What's the difference?'*

The false teachers in the Colossian Church teach a set of rules of do's and don'ts. **2:21** gives us a sample of it – *do not touch, do not taste, do not handle*.

In **3:5**, we find the apostle Paul telling the Colossian Christians not to do certain things. He has another list of don'ts in **3:8-9**. We can say that **3:12-17** is a list of dos from the apostle.

So what's the difference? Is what we find in **Colossians 3** just a Christianized and maybe more effective version of the dos and don'ts of **Colossians 2**?

The difference lies in the first 4 verses of **Colossians 3**. A quick scan of these 4 verses will tell us that the word '*Christ*' appears 4 times. While this is not a foolproof method of ascertaining the message of a passage (simply by counting the number of times a word appears), it nevertheless points us in the direction we should go.

Since the word '*Christ*' keeps appearing in these 4 verses, then the message of this passage must have something to do with Christ. We may not know all the details yet, but we can be certain that this passage is talking about Christ.

And Christ is the difference between the false teachers' rules and regulations in **chapter 2**, and Paul's commands and precepts in **chapter 3**. Christ is the reason and Christ is the motivation for doing those dos and not doing those don'ts from **3:5** onwards.

The word '*therefore*', right at the beginning of **3:5** should assure us that we are heading in the right direction.

My second question is *'Why the failure?'*

For many of us who are Christians, we are familiar with what Paul said in **chapter 3**. We know that uncleanness and evil desire mentioned in **verse 5** are bad. We know that indulging in these sins will only mean **verse 6** – we incur the wrath of God and will face the punishment of God.

Why then do we continue to lust and indulge? Why don't we put them to death as Paul commands us?

We know that anger and wrath mentioned in **verse 8** are to be put off from our lives. We know from **verse 13** that we are to bear with one another and forgive one another. But we don't do it and we don't want to do it. Why?

The reason for our failure is not due to education. We know! We know they are sins, we know they are wrong, and we even know the horrid consequences if we continue to indulge in them.

The reason for our failure is enjoyment.

Think of our eating habits. We know that fried chicken is bad for health. We know that vegetable salad is good for health. But for most of us, what will we choose to eat? Why?

For most of us, eating fried chicken brings a certain pleasure that is absent when we take vegetable salad. If we eat the veggies, it is often because we *have to*, not because we *want to*.

Our brother will continue his uncleanness and evil desire, never mind how many sermons he has heard that condemns these sins. He will continue, because there is enjoyment involved!

Our sister will remain angry and un-forgiving, even if her Bible Study today tells her to go the opposite direction, because frankly, anger is sweet and unforgiveness can be enjoyable!

The author of **Hebrews** calls this '*the passing pleasures of sin*'. We sin because it feels good! Sin is hard to resist because it has a remarkable capacity to please. Yes, the pleasure sin brings is passing, transient and fleeting. But it is still pleasure and that is why we keep coming back to do it!!

This is the reason for our repeated failures. 9 out of 10 times, immediate gratification will win over the fact that it is wrong and the fear of coming consequences.

Now, this is where our text – **Colossians 3:1-4** – comes in. This is why these 4 verses are so important. Here we have the battle of the pleasures. Here we are taught that our power for purity is found in our pleasure in a Person – Jesus Christ. Enjoyment empowers effort. Or how some believers in the past may put it, here we have "*the expulsive power of a greater affection*".

Let's zoom in on **verse 2** ~ *Set your mind on things above, not on the things on the earth.*

This is how most modern English Bible translation will have it --- *set your mind, think*. But the older translations, like the King James Bible and the Geneva Bible, would render it as '*set your affections on things above . . .*'

The word in Greek means to exercise your mind in something and to interest oneself in it. So it is not wrong to translate it as '*set your mind, think*'; it is just that '*affection*' reminds us that this is more than just a mental exercise!

Let's look at another verse to help us – **Matthew 16:23**.

Our New King James translation says this: *But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

The King James translation has it in this way: *But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

To savour something is more than just think about it, though the thinking must be present. It also includes the idea of '*giving oneself to the enjoyment of that thing*'!

So now we know what **Colossians 3:2** is telling us to do while still living in this world: *We are to think and to give ourselves to the enjoyment of things above!*

The things above --- what are they?

We read in the book of **Revelation (Revelation 21** in particular) that in heaven, the city is made of pure gold and the street of the city is pure gold. It is easy (although a mistake) to equate '*the things above*' to city of gold and streets of gold! "*Oh think of the gold there, think of the riches there, think of the pleasure there, and let that help you do what you need to do here.*" Is this the meaning? I do not think so.

Colossians 3:2 clearly contrasts the things above with the things on earth. What is the one distinctive difference between '*above*' and '*on earth*'? **Verse 1** ~ *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*

'Above' is where Christ is, and so the '*things above*' are 'the things of Christ'! The things of Christ mean, in very simple words, things that reveal Christ, focus on Christ and bring us more of Christ! So **Colossians 3:2** is ultimately a call to every Christian to *think of Christ and to give ourselves to the enjoyment of Christ!*

Let's remind ourselves again: *Why think of Christ and give ourselves to the enjoyment of Christ?* Because enjoyment empowers effort! Because our power for purity is found in our pleasures in a Person – Jesus Christ!

What about Christ do we think of?

Let's put away our zoom lens, take up our wide-angle lens and look at all four verses here: *Raised with Christ, hidden with Christ, Christ our life, appear with Christ in glory.*

There's a wedding here in these 4 verses! In a wedding, when you see the groom, you see the bride; when you see the bride, you see the groom. They sit together, they stand together, they walk together and they are together!

Isn't this what we encounter here in **Colossians 3:1-4**? Can we see Christ without the Christian here? Can we talk about the Christian here without mentioning Christ?

You talk about the Christian having died, and you have to talk about him dying with Christ. You talk about Christ raised from the dead, and you have to mention the Christian raised with Christ. He cannot be separated from Christ. He is hidden with Christ, Christ is his life and one day when Christ appears in glory, he will appear with Christ in glory! Christ will not appear in glory without the Christian! And the Christian cannot appear in glory alone without Christ!!

Here's a wedding, with Christ as the groom and we His bride! Think of the typical wedding service. The bride walks down the aisle, and at that time she is Miss Choo. Once the minister pronounced them '*man and wife*', from that moment onwards, she is Mrs. Joo.

What's the significance?

It tells us that she has a husband. It tells us that she is married to someone. It tells us that she is now joined to Mr. Joo, that she now shares in his life, shares his goals and aspirations, that she now gets her identity from Mr. Joo – she is now known, not as Miss Choo, but as Mrs. Joo! Some of you may find it demeaning but it wasn't meant to be demeaning, it was meant to be glorious! It was meant to reflect our relationship with Christ our Husband!

"Christ is our life," says Paul in **verse 4**.

Christ defines us. We have no independent life of our own. We can claim no right in our bodies or minds or souls or possessions, for He is our life. Our interests must be identical with His. Our goals and aims and visions must be co-extensive with His.

All that is precious and dear to Him should be to us as well. All that is alien and offensive to Him should affect us in the same way. He is our life. If He is sad, we are sad. If He is happy, we are happy. If He prospers, we rejoice. If He is disgraced, we moan.

Our glory is not to be called by our own name, but to get our name from Him, to be known as Mrs. Christ. We are His bride!!

These are the things of Christ that we are to set our minds and our affections on! Take time to think of Christ and our relationship with Him. Take time to enjoy Christ and enjoy our relationship with Him.

Let's remind ourselves again: *Why think of Christ and give ourselves to the enjoyment of Christ?* Because enjoyment empowers effort! Because our power for purity is found in our pleasures in a Person – Jesus Christ!

Enjoyment empowers effort.

This is Paul's message to the Colossian Christians here in these 4 verses. This is how the Christian Life is to be lived here on earth. It is not a teaching unique to Paul. The rest of the New Testament teaches the same thing. In fact, all the saints in all the ages have lived in this way.

Let's just look at a few verses in **Hebrews 11** to verify this.

First of all, please turn to **Hebrews 11:13-16**. What's the reason the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – could endure all the hardships in their life and remain faithful to God? A greater affection is driving them, isn't it? This thing called "*they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country*"!

Look down to **Hebrews 11:24-26**. What's the reason for the choice of Moses? Is sin pleasurable? Yes! But he is motivated by a greater pleasure – Christ, the greater riches, so much so that he would choose reproach over advancement!

Have a look now at **Hebrews 11:35**. This verse is not talking about famous believers like Abraham or Moses. It is talking about very ordinary believers like you and I. They don't even have a name; they go by 'others'! Yet see the same "*enjoyment empowers effort*" principle at work! Why are they prepared to be tortured and to die? A better resurrection!!

Turn one chapter back to **Hebrews 10:34**. Here the readers of **Hebrews** are in view. Can you see the same thing all over again? Enjoyment empowers effort! Joyfully accept the plundering of their goods because they know that they have a better and an enduring possession in heaven!

The focus is always on things above, on things of Christ, on Christ and His relationship with me. That gives me the power to obey, the power to be pure, the power to be faithful!

One more observation, as we return to **Colossians 3**, before the sermon ends.

Colossians 3:1 ~ *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above . . .*

The word 'seek' is a doing word, implying effort on our part. And the effort is to be continuous, with determination and consistency. Sporadic and fitful seeking will not suffice.

This word was used in the negative sense in **Luke 19:47** ~ *And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him*. How consistent and how determined were their efforts, and how daily!

We are to do the same, only in the positive manner. With consistency and determination, we are to seek to think of Christ and enjoy Christ daily.

Enjoyment empowers effort. Daily enjoyment empowers daily effort. Let's all do it! Let's all do it now!!

